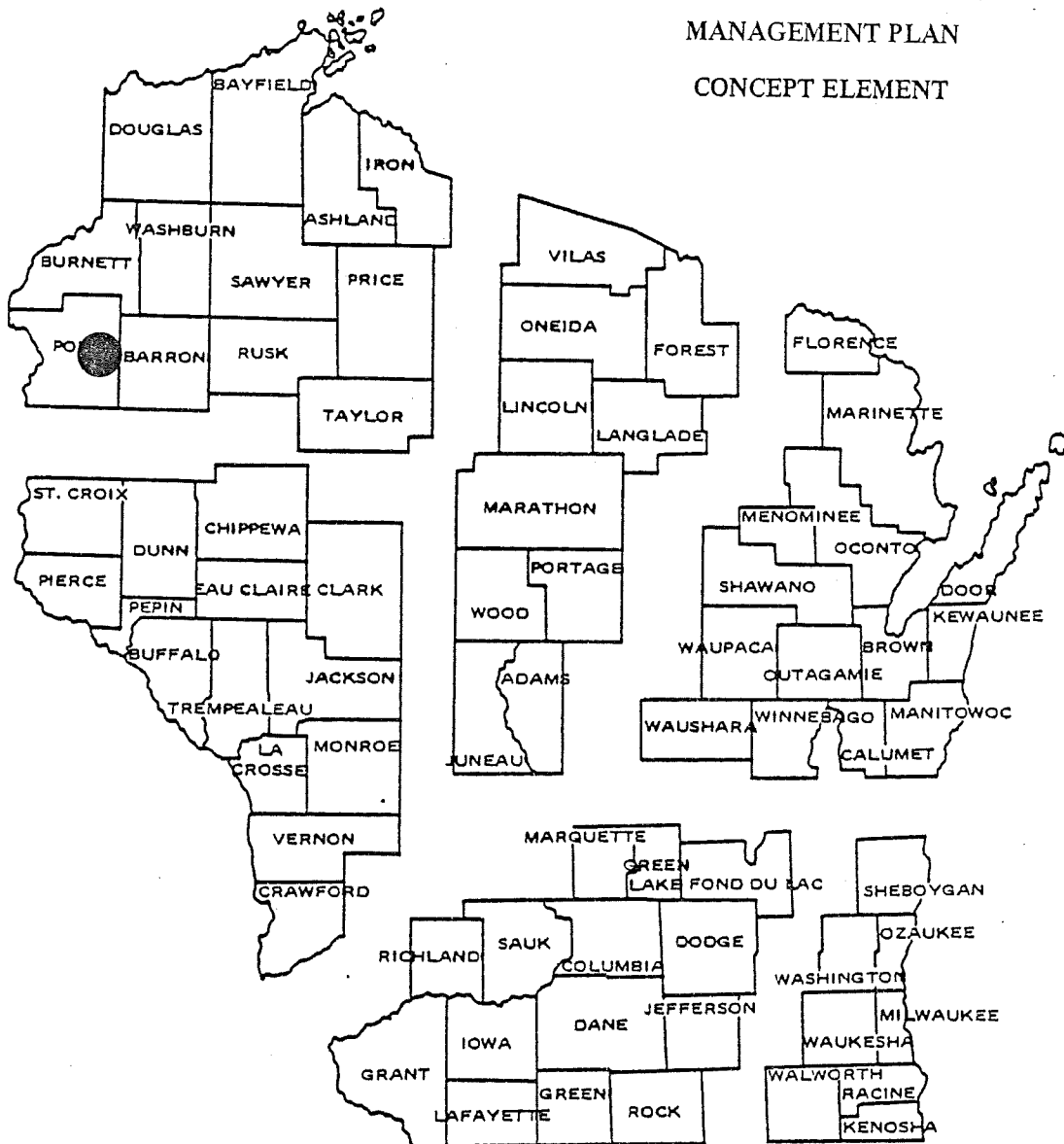


RICE BEDS CREEK WILDLIFE AREA

MANAGEMENT PLAN

CONCEPT ELEMENT



Property Task Force

Leader: John L. Porter, Wildlife Manager
Richard R. Cornelius, Fish Manager
John Dunn, Forester
Jerry Wagner, Conservation Warden

Approved By: J. R. Huntman
Date: 9/17/82

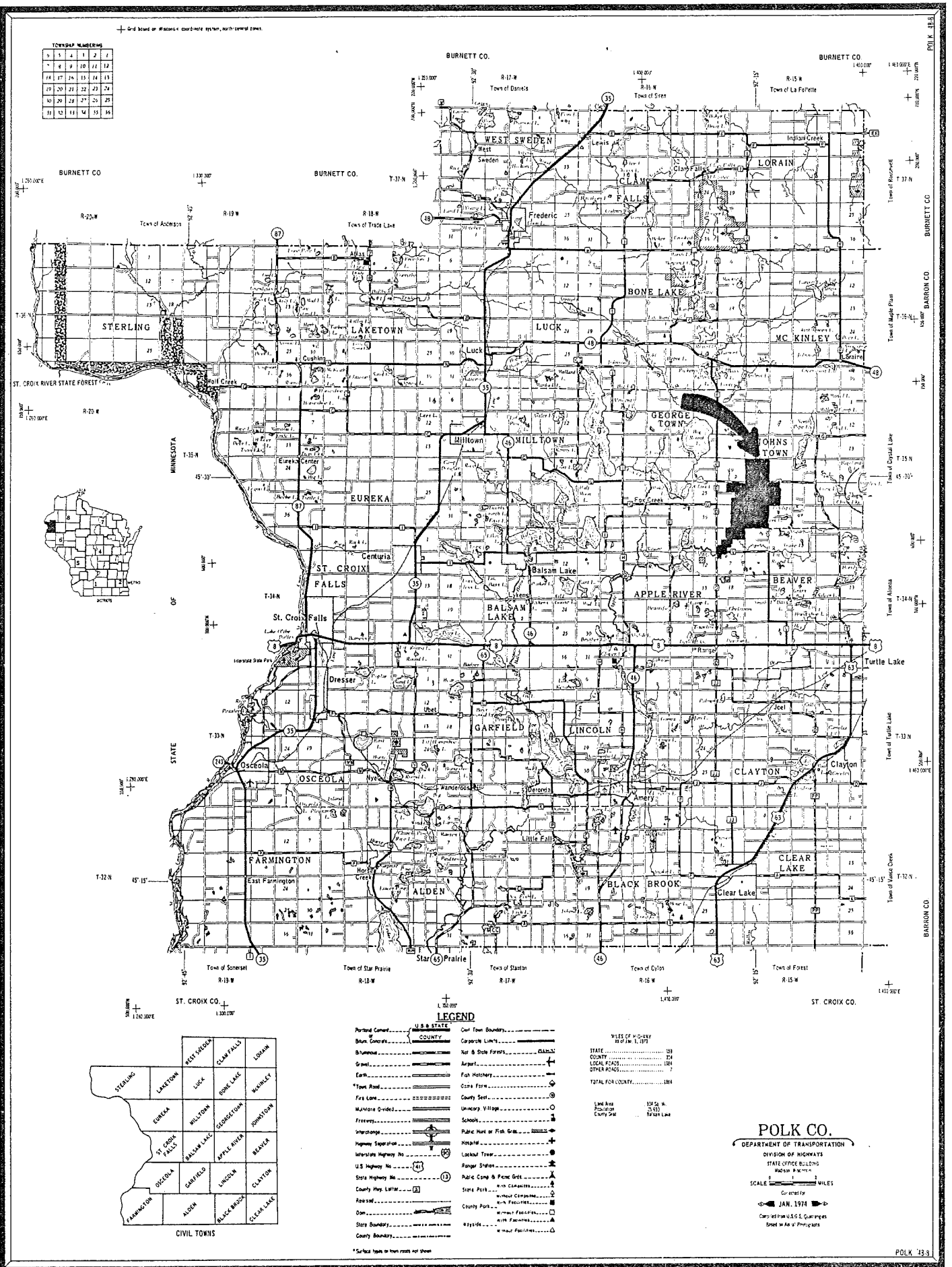


FIGURE 1 LOCATOR

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Rice Beds Creek Wildlife Area
GOAL, OBJECTIVES AND OTHER BENEFITS

Goal

To manage a state-owned wildlife area for the production of forest wildlife and brook trout as well as to provide public hunting, fishing and other compatible outdoor recreation and education.

Annual Objectives

1. Maintain a wintering deer population of about 100 deer per section of range (250 animals).
2. Produce a fall ruffed grouse population of at least 100 birds per section (500 birds).
3. Provide 5,000 participant days of hunting opportunity as follows:

	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Participant Days</u>
a.	Deer	2,500
b.	Grouse/woodcock	1,000
c.	Other small game	1,500

4. Provide 500 angler days of trout fishing opportunity averaging 0.7 trout per fishing hour and 130 angler days of warmwater fishing.

Annual Additional Benefits

1. Provide an average furbearer harvest of 300 muskrats and 10 beaver as well as other hunting and trapping opportunities.
2. Accommodate 2,500 participant days of other recreation and education such as cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, ricing, photography and nature observation.
3. Harvest merchantable timber on 100 acres.
4. Contribute toward the habitat of other nongame wildlife including migratory, endangered and threatened species.

RECOMMENDED MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Acquisition (Figure 2)

The wildlife area land purchase goal is 3,516.01 following a deletion of 200 acres in 1982. The state owns 3,101.14 acres and intends to purchase all private lands remaining within the revised property boundary.

Land Use Designations

The wildlife area will be classed entirely as a Wildlife Management Area (RD₂) except for a small Indian Mound which will be designated Habitat Protection Area (HP). This land use designation will permit habitat management for the wildlife and fishery resources.

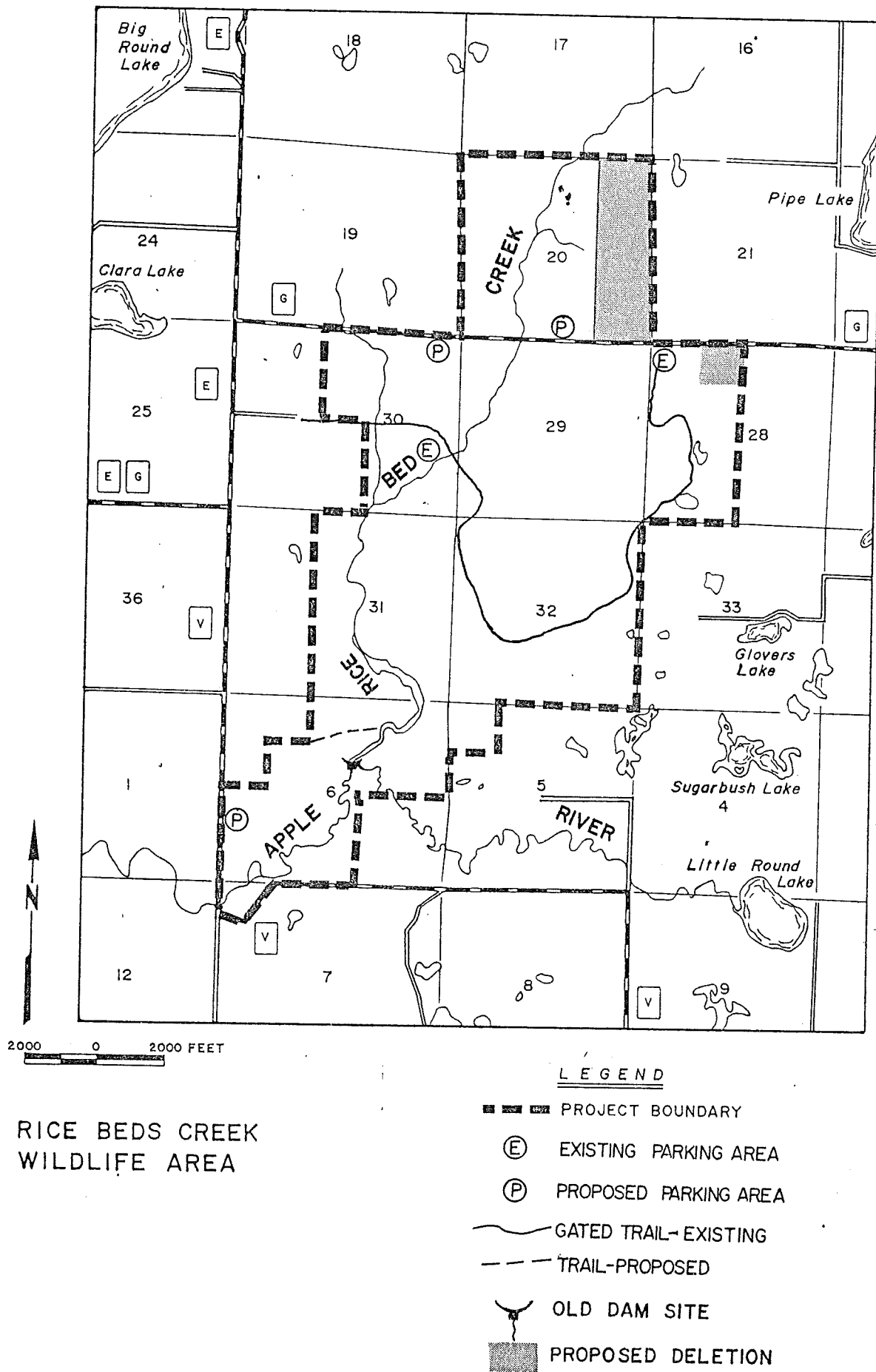


FIGURE 3 EXISTING AND PROPOSED DEVELOPMENTS

Beaver are a major threat to trout habitat and constant effort will be required to keep beaver populations to a minimum through the use of special trapping seasons and other liberal regulations. Beaver dams and debris which are impeding streamflow will periodically be removed by DNR crews.

The acquisition of a 240-acre parcel just north of County Highway "G" is of the highest priority for both fish and wildlife management. This tract contains trout spawning areas for brook trout and also valuable deer yarding cover. It also would provide access to the 240 acre DNR owned tract immediately to the north of it which presently is landlocked.

All areas proposed for development will be examined for the presence of endangered and threatened wild animals and wild plants. If listed species are found, development will be suspended until the District Endangered and Nongame Species Coordinator is consulted, the site evaluated, and appropriate protective measures taken.

A complete biological inventory of the property will be conducted as funds permit. Additional property objectives may be developed following completion of such an inventory.

A small Indian mound 4-5 feet wide and about 4 feet high has been located and will be protected. All areas of future development will also be investigated for the presence or absence of historical or archaeological sites and appropriate protective measures taken to protect significant sites. Should any sites be found during development, construction will be suspended until the State Historical Preservation Office is consulted.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Rice Beds Creek Wildlife Area is a large, undeveloped tract of forested land in East Central Polk County, located ten miles east of Balsam Lake and six miles northwest of Turtle Lake, Wisconsin (Figure 1). It serves as habitat for a variety of species of wildlife including a large wintering deer herd. It contains three miles of Class I brook trout water, 1.5 miles of the Apple River and a small flowage well known for its wild rice production and waterfowl use.

The wildlife area was established in 1951 when the Wisconsin Conservation Commission initiated a federal aid (Pittman-Robertson) project to acquire and develop the area. The original purchases were to acquire and protect winter deer habitat. Later the project was expanded for multiple benefits, having values for deer, upland game, waterfowl, furbearers and trout. Subsequent purchases have taken place over the years to expand the property to its present size. In 1963, the Bureau of Fish Management purchased 240 acres of land, one-half mile north of the wildlife area. This land was purchased with remnant fish habitat funds to protect springs on the headwaters of Rice Beds Creek.

The original management proposal was to create additional wetland habitat by reconstructing a lowhead dam at the site of an old logging dam on the Apple River. The project has not been carried out because of the existing flowage's value to wild rice production, waterfowl, furbearers, and the concern for flooding out valuable coniferous deer yarding cover and trout water on the north end of the flowage.

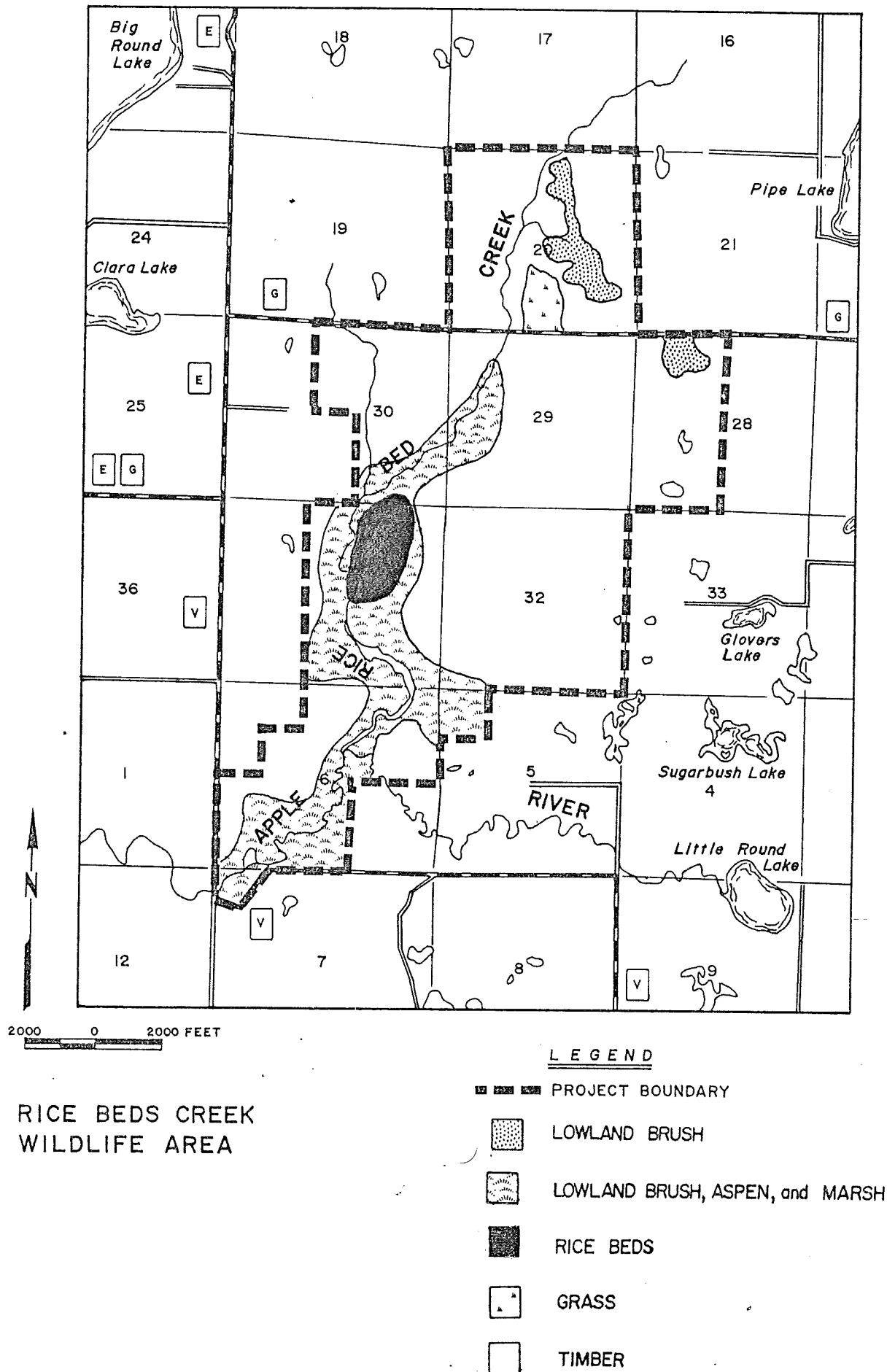


FIGURE 4 VEGETATION

The property is currently managed for forest wildlife and trout. Of prime importance is a traditional winter deer yarding area and also an excellent brook trout stream. Generally, the habitat is very good for most wildlife species frequenting the area. However, forest stands are all fairly mature and even-aged and, an active timber sale program would benefit most species. The primary recreational use is small game, deer and waterfowl hunting. Trout fishing, trapping, cross-country skiing, nature study, and hiking also provide significant recreation and educational value.

Past management activities have consisted of timber sales, noncommercial shearing to regenerate aspen, openings maintenance, trail development and maintenance, parking area development, boundary fencing and posting. Management of the fishery resource has consisted primarily of brook trout stocking in Rice Beds Creek. Trout stocking has been carried out almost annually since 1939.

SUPPORT DATA

The topography of the area is gently rolling with the surrounding land a fairly flat outwash plain. Soils are sandy loam with glaciated rock mixed in. Much of the area is poorly drained and many marsh areas exist.

Wildlife species indigenous to the wooded and lowland habitats in this part of the state exist on the property. Game and furbearer species commonly found on the area are white tailed deer, ruffed grouse, woodcock, snowshoe hare, muskrat, mink, otter, beaver, raccoon, weasel, coyote, skunk, red fox, and occasionally a bobcat and gray fox. Waterfowl use includes mallards, wood duck, and teal as the predominant species.

Bald eagles and ospreys (endangered species) are frequently observed but are not known to nest on this area. No other endangered or threatened species of mammals, birds or reptiles are known to be present on the property. A large variety of game and nongame birds and animals use the area, both residents and migrants.

Forest reconnaissance was completed for the wildlife area in 1972. The majority of the area is covered by three primary types: aspen, oak/northern hardwoods and swamp hardwoods (Table 1 and Figure 4). No endangered or threatened species of wild plants are known to be present on the property.

TABLE 1 - VEGETATIVE COVER

<u>Cover Type</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>% of Area</u>
Aspen	1,016	30.8
Swamp Hardwoods	729	22.1
Oak	469	14.1
Lowland Brush	433	13.1
Northern Hardwoods	245	7.4
Muskeg	176	5.3
Swamp Conifers	96	2.9
Water or Lake	74	2.2
Grassed Field	65	2.0
White Pine	2	.06

Rice Beds Creek is a small (2.0 cfs) stream located in central Polk County. It flows in a southerly direction for 6 miles and joins the Apple River. Approximately 5 miles of this stream are within the wildlife area. The upper 2 miles of the stream in the wildlife area flow primarily through forest, while the lower 3 miles flow mainly through shrub and open marsh. Heavy dense stands of tag alder are common along the streambanks.

Much of the lower 2 miles of stream were impounded by an old logging flowage, and approximately 10 acres are still impounded (somewhat) by the remains of the dam (Figure 3). The impoundment marks the lower limit of the trout water. Wild rice is abundant in the flowage area, giving the stream its name.

Rice Beds Creek is generally shallow with infrequent pools; and debris and abandoned beaver dams impede flow in some areas. Substantial spring activity occurs in the headwaters in Sections 20 and 29. Sand is the primary bottom type, with silt and gravel present. Silt and detritus are common in the impounded area. One small intermittent stream enters Rice Beds Creek from the west in Section 31.

Brook trout are common in Rice Beds Creek and other fish species present include northern pike, largemouth bass, white suckers, redbelly dace, mottled sculpins, creek chubs and mudminnows.

The Apple River flows through the wildlife area for 1 1/2 miles and varies from 20 to 35 feet in width; it has an average depth of 2 to 5 feet. Bottom types are primarily sand, silt and detritus. There is very little cover in the river channel. The river runs through forest and a shrub marsh.

Fish present in this portion of the Apple River include largemouth bass, northern pike, rock bass, white suckers, yellow perch, horny head chubs, common shiners, creek chubs and longnose dace. No endangered or threatened species of fish, amphibians or molluscs are known to be present on the property.

Two vernal (occurring in spring) lakes, 2.5 and 5 acres in size, are located in Section 28.

TABLE 2 - WATER AREA

<u>Name</u>	<u>Size or Length</u>	<u>Fishery</u>
Rice Beds Creek	3.0 miles	Class I trout
Rice Beds Creek	2.0 miles	Forage
Apple River	1.5 miles	Warmwater
Unnamed Lake	5.0 acres	None
Unnamed Lake	3.0 acres	None

No historical or archaeological sites are known to exist on the property. The State Historical Society has been contacted and until the area has been adequately examined, all development plans that could be potentially damaging to unreported sites will be reviewed.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS

One of the main problems in the past has been severe overbrowsing by wintering deer resulting in starvation in severe winters. The potential for forest production is good, but timber markets have been poor in the past precluding regular timber sales. Access is also a problem as it is often too wet to conduct a timber operation. This problem can be greatly alleviated if the cutting of aspen and hardwoods is implemented as planned. A key factor is timber markets which recently have appeared to improve in this area of Polk County.

Rice Beds Creek can support only limited fishing opportunities due to its small size. There is poor access to much of the stream and fishability is poor. Heavy tag alder cover and beaver activity have degraded trout habitat, and continued beaver activity is a very serious problem.

The area is presently lacking in grassy openings. Existing openings are in two large tracts. These openings would be more beneficial if the acreage was in many smaller units. Log landings and trails will be seeded and maintained as forest openings. Mowing will be required periodically to maintain the desired white clover stand and also to prevent forest succession from reclaiming these open areas.

Because of maintenance costs, current DNR policies and the interference with wintering deer, snowmobiles are not allowed on the wildlife area. However, they do occasionally violate this restriction and pass through the area. It has not been a significant problem.

Littering, signs and gate destruction is a fairly common problem. It is generally agreed that this problem is associated with nonfishing and nonhunting activities.

Because the property is located in a rural, fairly highly populated farming community, domestic dogs running loose and killing deer in the deer yard has been a problem. This occurs every severe winter when the deer already are under stress from deep snow and low temperatures.

Because the land acquisition is nearly complete, the remaining parcels may be difficult to purchase. However, to prevent cottage development and subdividing in a state-owned wildlife area, the remaining tracts should be acquired as soon as possible.

APPENDIX A

Agency and Advisory Group Comments

By: Henry W. Kolka
Representing: Wild Resources Advisory Council
Date: April 30, 1982

General Review

The Wild Resources Advisory Council wishes to congratulate the Rice Beds Creek Wildlife Area Task Force of John L. Porter, Richard R. Cornelius, John Dunn and Jerry Wagner for submitting a very versatile and sound Management Plan Concept Element for the property. The WRAC finds the aspect of managing the wild resources, generally, quite exceptional, but much too weak on listing of wildlife data. It is true that the planners project the filling of this void when adequate funding is available. Considering all of the existing factors, particularly the present economic conditions, the species inventories will never be completed for the wildlife area. WRAC suggests that knowledgeable people from DNR district, amateur specialists from the private sector, and specialists from the nearby universities be invited to help in this effort. College and university students are often looking for field work topics to satisfy course requirements. The Task Force through proper channels could supply a list to the educational institutions. To intelligently implement management plans for the project area, such inventories, even if not 100 percent complete, would have tremendous value in habitat manipulation and educational contribution.

DNR RESPONSE: Volunteers will be sought for inventory assistance. Because minimal management occurs on this property, the importance of the inventory needs is greatly reduced.

Comments and Recommendations

1. Background Information.

An excellent preview for the Concept Element WRAC recommends the following additions to the last part of paragraph four:

- a. Insertion of nature study between words skiing and and.
- b. Addition of and educational value at end of the last sentence.

DNR RESPONSE: Concur; text modified.

2. Goal.

WRAC recommends the addition of and education to end the sentence.

DNR RESPONSE: Concur; text added.

3. Annual Additional Benefits--two additions.

- a. Item 2. WRAC recommends the insertion of and education between the words recreation and such.
- b. Item 4. The Council recommends the insertion of nongame between words other and wildlife.

DNR RESPONSE: Concur; text modified

4. Acquisition.

WRAC thinks it is a mistake and very misleading to list the Rice Beds Creek acreage goal as "presently 3,716.01 acres." Actually, with the 1981 deletion, it should be stated at 3,516.01 acres. The stated 3,716.01 acres should be preceded by the word was and not is. As it now stands, the property is in better shape than a majority of state-owned land blocks with 88 percent under its control.

DNR RESPONSE: Concur; text modified.

5. Land Use Designation.

WRAC even with limited information does not agree that the total state owned property of 3,101.26 acres should be classed as RD₂. Certainly the so-called "two vernal lakes" mentioned deserve special classification. No doubt there are other significantly unique sites.

DNR RESPONSE: Do not agree. The vernal lakes are common throughout the region. No other unique land feature has been identified.

6. Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4.

Good cartography. They match well with text. Excellent. WRAC suggests that the streams on all three figures, listed above, be labeled.

DNR RESPONSE: Streams labeled.

7. Planned Management.

The Task Force does itself proud under this heading. All major aspects of a very diverse ecosystem receive astute professional attention. WRAC is particularly impressed with the proposals; to solve the whitetail winter yarding problem, preserving snag and tall trees for the benefit of ^{Beds} wildlife that live in such habitats, and releasing the Rice Beds Creek from tag elder bondage. The Council questions the logic in the statement "Rice Beds Creek is too small to warrant intensive instream habitat improvement." Could we assume that a moderate degree of instream improvement is in the plans? After all, why waste the time and resource in annual stocking (last paragraph under Background Info.) of the stream with poor carrying capability.

DNR RESPONSE: Stocking is strictly on a put and take basis. Installation of instream devices in waters with limited capabilities is not warranted.

Paragraphs 3 and 4

Paragraph 3 is an excellent statement of intent, but lacks any credibility without a substantial species inventory. (Refer to comments under General Review.)

DNR RESPONSE: Noted under General Review.

8. Support Data - paragraphs 2, 3, and 4.

Excellent listing of game species in paragraph 2. However, paragraphs 3 and 4 are an utter disappointment. Both paragraphs parade the statement that "no endangered or threatened species are known to be present on the property." This is a typical swivel chair approach. Not until substantial inventories of all wildlife species on the property are completed will that statement gain any credibility.

DNR RESPONSE: Inventory needs have been identified.

9. Paragraphs 1 and 2 below Table 1.

The rice beds of the Rice Beds Creek Wildlife Area gain considerable visibility throughout the report, yet nowhere is there an expression of their intrinsic value to the area. From the information that the WRAC has gained from the report, the wild rice beds could very conveniently be designated as unique natural area.

DNR RESPONSE: Do not agree. The rice bed does not qualify as a natural area.

10. Last line on Page 7.

WRAC recommends that the two vernal lakes in Section 28 be designated a Wilderness Lakes Natural Area.

DNR RESPONSE: Do not agree. The lakes do not meet the wilderness lake standards.

11. Resource Management Problems.

We compliment the Task Force on this section. It is an excellent presentation. The planners' stand on snowmobiling is very commendable considering all the environmental factors. WRAC at this point usually reviews the alternatives outlined by the Task Force and supports the one favored by them. Under the circumstances as portrayed by the Concept Element, WRAC supports the plan under the heading Recommended Management and Development Program (with Council's recommendations) and urges that the Natural Resources Board do likewise.

By: Forest Stearns

Representing: Scientific Areas Preservation Council

Date: May 5, 1982

We have reviewed the Rice Beds Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan and find no conflicts with our program objectives. Thank you for providing opportunity for review and comment.

By: T. J. Hart
Representing: Department of Transportation
Date: April 23, 1982

We have reviewed the above-noted Management Plan and have determined that the proposal will not have a significant effect upon the transportation environment. However, as was discussed in Transportation District 8's meeting with the Polk County Highway Commissioner, all off-road parking areas should continue to be constructed by DNR in a manner that maintains the safety of the areas highways.

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this Management Plan.

By: Willard D. Lind
Representing: Conservation Congress
Date: April 30, 1982

Page 1 - The old dam should be re-built to maintain some control over the level of water in the old flowage. Local residents claim that there is no longer any wild rice because the flowage is drying up. The rice should be planted again as an attraction to waterfowl.

DNR RESPONSE: The water level has gone down in recent years. Some additional flowage improvement is warranted.

Goals - Beaver and otter control should begin at once if the trout are going to survive in the Rice Beds Creek.

DNR RESPONSE: Otter control is not required. Special seasons and contracts will be used to control beaver.

Additional Comments - One local resident who owns land within the area (west side, Sec. 31) plans a cranberry marsh which does not fit in with proposed management goals. This project should be vigorously opposed.

DNR RESPONSE: The Department will advise the landowner of the law as well as views of his proposal.

APPENDIX B

Public Informational Meeting Comments

Date Conducted - April 22, 1982
Location - Polk County Ag Center, Balsam Lake
Number Attending - 23 participants

MAJOR AREA OF CONCERN:

1. Stream (Rice Beds Creek) has not been stocked for several years -- is "dead" as far as trout fishing is concerned. Beaver dams have caused a lot of damage to the stream.

2. Why no snowmobile trails?

DNR RESPONSE: Snowmobile trails are generally not allowed on wildlife lands, especially deer yards.

3. Dogs are a problem in the deer yard -- had called warden and nothing was done about it. They were not aware of any dogs killed this year.

4. What's the beaver population presently?

DNR RESPONSE: The Fish Management people are planning an intensive beaver control program on the stream this year.

5. Over-mature oaks should be cut rather than let die of old age.

DNR RESPONSE: The DNR wants to maintain the oak acreage, but possibly could have some harvesting in the oak stands.

6. No more wild rice occurring on the area -- beaver dams blown out by the DNR destroyed the rice beds.

DNR RESPONSE: THE DNR did not blow out the dam.

7. The old logging dam needed maintaining and that would keep the wild rice beds.

8. Beaver dams all up and down the stream have warmed up the water to the point of stagnation. Several people felt quite strongly that the beaver had done a lot of damage.

9. Ted Majeske, a landowner on the west side of the project explained that he planned to develop a cranberry bed on his property and stated that he could build a dike and divert water as long as he owned the property. He stated that he was familiar with some court cases where the DNR had tried to give cranberry farmers a hard time, but they had the right to pretty much do as they pleased.

DNR RESPONSE: Explained that he should contact the Department before starting because he needed to obtain the proper permits.

Majeske further explained that he planned to build a dam, and that the state court says cranberry growers have the ultimate right to divert water.

DNR RESPONSE: A dam would flood property that he does not own and would affect trout water.

10. Indian burial grounds are located on the project near the old farmstead on the east side of the Rice Beds Area. Mr. Kingsbury, Turtle Lake, and Bill Pulling, Johnstown, both knew the location of the burial grounds.

11. Better gates are needed to keep the four-wheelers out.

DNR RESPONSE: Concur.

12. A narrow walking trail should be cut through the project. The project area has a lot of natural beauty which the public could enjoy with a designated trail.

DNR RESPONSE: Concur, but funds not available.

These comments are not a verbatim transcript, but merely paraphrase the major points of concern and comments made by DNR representatives.

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